

# Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) – Supporting Early Identification and Intervention for Children with Special Educational Needs

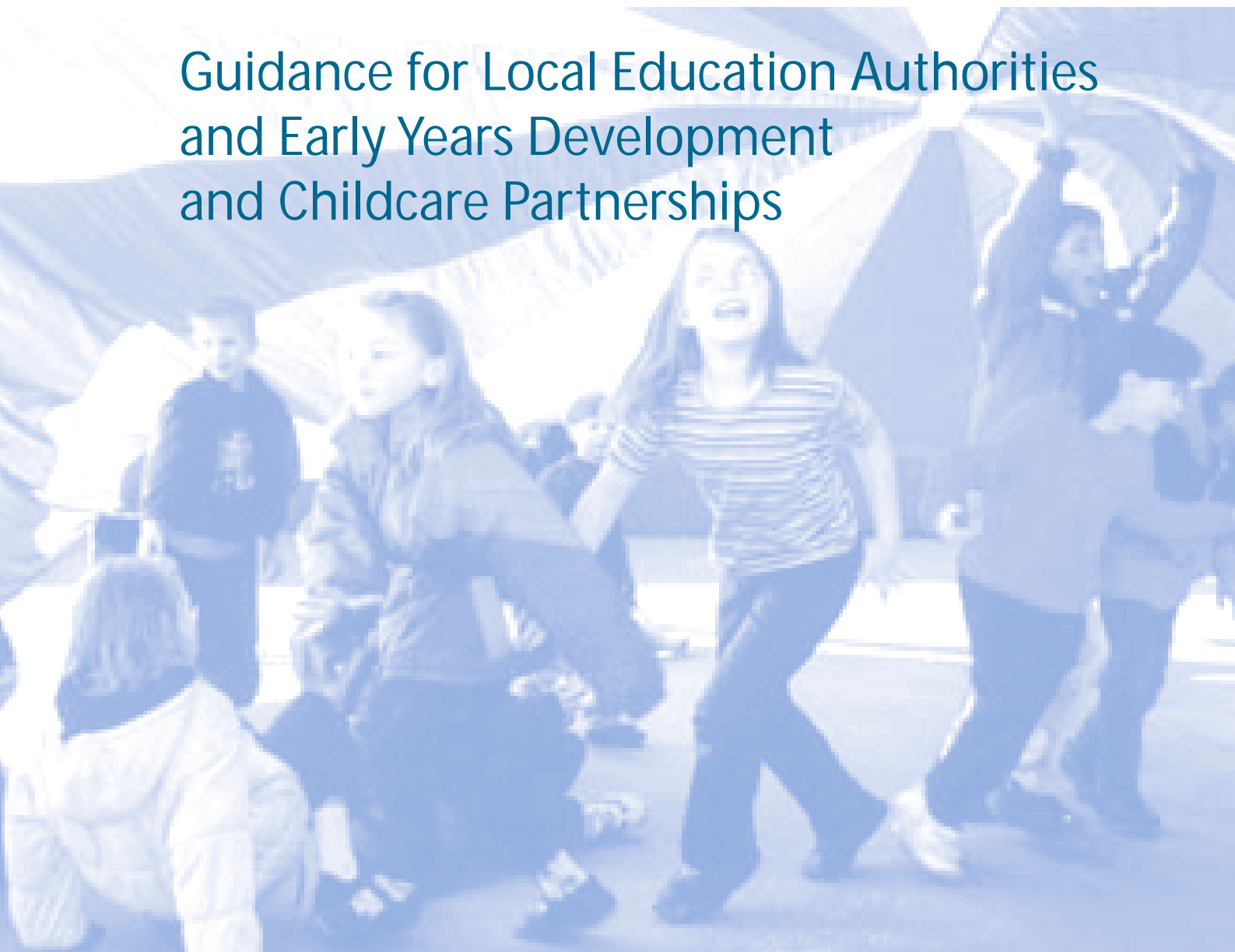
Guidance for Local Education Authorities  
and Early Years Development  
and Childcare Partnerships



**SureStart**

# Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) - Supporting Early Identification and Intervention for Children with Special Educational Needs

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# Introduction

1. It is a Government manifesto commitment *'that children with special educational needs should have their needs identified earlier'*. The focus should be on providing effective early intervention programmes to help remove barriers to learning for children with identified special educational needs. It is also about helping to ensure that **all** children have the opportunity to reach their full potential both in the early years and in later education. All children in the Foundation Stage should have the opportunity to progress in an **inclusive** early learning environment flexibly through the stepping stones and work towards the early learning goals.
2. We envisage Area SENCOs as a crucial new resource for the future to support these aims. The introduction of Area SENCOs and the expected ratios of 1 Area SENCO to every 20 non-maintained early years (Foundation Stage) settings by 2004 will enable LEAs/EYDCPs to provide a concentrated focus at an early stage into children's development. Universal early education provision for all 3 year olds by 2004 will also provide us with a good opportunity to reach more children early. We hope that through LEAs/EYDCPs commitments to develop intervention strategies to support the Area SENCOs initiative, we will make a positive impact for future generations of children and that this impact will be significant.
3. Providing the intended ratio is achieved by 2004, LEAs/EYDCPs may extend the Area SENCO role to childcare settings working with younger children and settings that may wish to register to provide Government funded early education. The views of school headteachers and SENCOs may also be sought to consider whether they would welcome the extension of the programme to include LEA school nursery/reception classes and maintained nursery schools. In light of locally identified needs LEAs may recruit more Area SENCOs above the minimum 1:20 ratio.
4. In recognising the significant amount of work that will need to be done to reduce the underachievement gap and enable all children to reach their full potential, we have requested that the Area SENCOs equate to full time posts to support the target ratio. Area SENCOs are intended to build on and strengthen existing statutory services, and provide immediate hands on support to settings requiring particular and urgent assistance.

The overall role of the Area SENCO will be to empower all those working in early years settings to develop inclusive early learning environments and to help them support children in removing barriers to learning wherever these exist.



5. All SENCOs working in the early years, including primary school SENCOs and early years setting SENCOs, should be encouraged to work with specialist staff who generally work in/with schools. All SENCOs working in the early years should form part of the overall cohort of SEN support and should be included in all SEN training and development programmes. Training should be tailored appropriately to suit needs.

## About this guidance

6. This guidance is aimed at supporting LEAs/EYDCPs in developing local Area SENCO strategies and is based on the 2001-02 Area SENCO pilots. It sets out the envisaged role and practices of Area SENCOS as they empower all those working with children in the early years to create inclusive and effective early learning environments. It also outlines key areas that need to be in place to support Area SENCOs. It sets out some of the ways in which they can develop positive working relationships with settings and support services to help ensure all children are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. None of the lists or suggestions in this guidance are exhaustive and LEAs/EYDCPs are encouraged to develop their own innovative programmes based on this guidance and their experience.

## Funding

7. We have ensured that there are significant increases in SSA to support the implementation of Area SENCOs and qualified teacher involvement in non-maintained settings. It is crucial that LEAs/EYDCPs secure the resources to meet the target ratio of 1 Area SENCO to every 20 non-maintained early education settings by 2004. EYDCP plans must set out that this ratio will be achieved and future plans may request assurances that the ratios will be maintained. EYDCP Plans will not be approved if this is not set out in a clear format as advised by DfES in the 2003-04 EYDCP Planning Guidance.
8. For children with SEN, but without a Statement, LEAs have the power to supply goods and services to non-maintained early education settings. LEAs are financially compensated to supply these services via their Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). For children with Statements, LEAs have a legal duty to arrange the educational provision specified in the Statement.

## Acknowledgements

9. The DfES wishes to thank participating 2001-02 Area SENCO pilot LEAs and EYDCPs and all the staff that have worked so hard to make the project a success, these are: Brighton and Hove, Lewisham, Northumberland and Rochdale. The Government has made a clear commitment to supporting children with SEN and disabilities at an early stage and we at the DfES welcome the participating EYDCPs/LEAs enthusiasm to take part in these pilots and work with us in developing this future resource. The findings and case study examples from the Pilot Areas form the basis of this guidance.

# Area SENCOs - 1

## Do local people working in the early years need to know about Area SENCOs?

10. All those working in the early years should be aware of the introduction of Area SENCOs. They should also have the opportunity to inform the Area SENCO programme.

## What should an Area SENCO do?

11. The overall role of the Area SENCO will be to empower all those working in early education settings to respond to the diverse needs of children in their care. They should build on successful local initiatives, early years advisers may already be working in the Area SENCO role. The LEA/EYDCP will need to agree the management and leadership of the programme in consultation with Area SENCOs if they are in place.
12. The following list provides the core support Area SENCOs will need to provide to settings and the possible extension of their role to support local initiatives/strategies.
13. Core support areas:
  - Providing advice and practical support for the application of the graduated approach to identification, assessment and intervention within the SEN Code of Practice;
  - Providing day to day support for setting based SENCOs in drawing up and implementing an SEN policy covering inclusion and admissions of children with special educational needs;
  - Building links between the settings and LEA, Social and Health services;
  - Developing and disseminating good practice;
  - Supporting the development and delivery of training both on an individual setting and wider basis;
  - Developing links with existing SENCO networks to incorporate setting based SENCOs to support smooth transitions to school nursery and reception classes;
  - To link up with other Government initiatives such as Sure Start, Neighbourhood Nurseries, etc;
14. Possible extension of the Area SENCO Role
  - Informing and working with the Parent Partnership to promote effective early years work with parents;
  - To support the EYDCP/LEA to develop and improve the resource strategy to support children with SEN in early years settings and its transparency on how and when it can be accessed;
  - To support LEAs/EYDCPs on the development of transparent protocols to access local resources;

- To support the development of links with voluntary and other organisations to promote the effective use of all resources available locally;
- To support collaborative working, together with EYDCP and other statutory agencies to influence and participate in activities related to early identification and intervention for children with SEN.
- To help build links with local toy libraries and the local voluntary sector.

*Note: Before any extension of the role careful consideration needs to be taken led by an analysis of the needs of the settings – this should remain the priority. These lists are not exhaustive and the sections in this guidance provide further advice on some of these areas.*

## Who can be an Area SENCO?

15. It was initially envisaged that Area SENCOs should be qualified teachers, where possible, but in response to LEAs/EYDCPs views and the findings of the Area SENCO pilots we have reviewed this position. It will therefore be for LEAs/EYDCPs to decide what relevant qualifications/and or extensive experience either in health or education will be appropriate for this role. The varied experience of individual Area SENCOs may be invaluable and the key to effective practice will be in sharing such expertise amongst a team – see *Area SENCO Teams*.
16. Qualities and competencies to look for in an Area SENCO might be:
  - Extensive experience of supporting young children with special educational needs
  - Extensive knowledge of early childhood development
  - Experience of providing training
  - Experience of working with families
  - Management skills
  - Enthusiasm to support children with special educational needs
  - Effective interpersonal and communication skills
  - Effective verbal and written skills
  - Effective organisational skills
  - Ability to work on own initiative
  - Ability to work as a team
  - Flexible approach to working
  - Effective 'human face' approach whilst maintaining high standard of professionalism



## What support will Area SENCOs need?

17. The training arranged by LEAs/EYDCPs for Area SENCOs will depend upon their existing expertise and knowledge but it will be essential that all Area SENCOs are familiar and have received training on the SEN Code of Practice (2001), the Foundation Stage and early childhood development. Training should also be provided in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to enable Area SENCOs to support settings in implementing DDA requirements. If appropriate, further training should be provided on the delivery of training and development outlining the approaches to use when working with adults in different sized groups and generally on "how to get your message across" using a variety of strategies.
18. It may also be possible for Area SENCOs to work and train alongside other professionals to develop their skills. They may wish to take-up training offered by local voluntary groups covering specific disabilities and work with local teams from these agencies such as SCOPE development workers. On completion of any initial training it is reasonable for Area SENCOs to take responsibility for their own training and development within the context of their own professional development.
19. The nature of the Area SENCOs work may be emotionally charged. They will need to support settings dealing with sensitive, and sometimes stressful, cases and it will be a tremendous responsibility for each member of the team. The LEA/EYDCP will need to regularly review support provided to Area SENCOs.
20. All funds made available for early years/SEN training can also support training and development of Area SENCOs.

## The Area SENCO Team

21. In order to share knowledge and expertise the effective running of an Area SENCO Team is essential. To support this, the LEA/EYDCP should decide on the most effective place for the team to be based and who should be the overall manager. But wherever based it will be essential for the team to work closely with both early years and SEN departments within the LEA. We do not plan to prescribe a particular model of a team but the following chart shows two examples outlining the possible professional backgrounds that Area SENCOs may have, which brings together a range of expertise.

*Possible professional backgrounds  
of Area SENCOs – Example Team 1*

Qualified Teacher  
– Team Leader (FT)

Health Visitor - (FT)

NNEB qualified practitioner - (FT)

Newly qualified Educational  
Psychologist -(PT)

Speech and Language Therapist - (PT)

*Possible professional backgrounds  
of Area SENCOs – Example Team 2*

Educational psychologist  
– Team leader (PT)

NVO level 3 qualified early  
years practitioner (FT)

Social worker (PT)

Experienced Portage Worker (PT)

SEN Learning support assistant (PT)

Qualified Teacher (SENCO experience) (FT)

*FT – Full time post*

*PT – Part-time post*

*The 1 Area SENCO to every 20 non-maintained settings ratio is based on full time posts.  
The total of part-time posts will need to be combined in order to identify a full-time  
equivalent post and decide if the ratio has been met.*

22. It is important that Area SENCOs meet regularly in order to reap the positive effects of sharing their own individual knowledge, understandings and expertise. This is helpful in addressing particular issues within settings and particularly important if supporting a setting develop an interim intervention plan for a child with complex needs. The team should continue to monitor their effectiveness and as case work loads increase the team may need to devise new systems to manage this work. It might be useful for the team to also have direct support from an Educational Psychologist wherever possible. It may be helpful for the team to also have insight into health services and a member of the team with background in this service, such as a health visitor, can support this as part of the Area SENCO team.
23. It is also important to meet regularly with the overall manager of the programme to discuss progress and the day to day running of the team.

## SEN Code of Practice - 2

*Note: This section touches on the support settings will need in relation to the SEN Code of Practice. It does not replace the statutory responsibilities set out in the Code to which all settings must have regard.*

24. Many early years settings will need support in implementing the statutory requirements set out in the SEN Code of Practice. Evidence from a participating pilot demonstrated that before training 28% of identified SENCOs in the non-maintained sector had no knowledge of the Code and a further 57% had limited understanding of the Code. Area SENCOs should advise early years settings of their responsibilities and help staff put their responsibilities into context. An objective for staff in the setting should be to feel comfortable and confident in carrying out their duties in relation to the SEN Code of Practice.
25. Area SENCOs can provide interim support programmes for settings that are waiting for responses from external services. In some instances, the Area SENCOs may need to support the setting based SENCO in co-ordinating meetings for a particular child with the parents, professionals and other setting staff.
26. Amongst responsibilities under the Code, the Area SENCO may need to support the setting SENCO and other staff in:
  - liaison with parents and other professionals in respect of children with SEN;
  - ensuring Individual Education Plans and support plans are effective; and
  - helping staff develop relevant background information about individual children with SEN and help ensure this is collated, recorded and updated.

### The graduated approach

27. Area SENCOs will need to help settings embed into their practice the graduated approach as set out in section 4:9 of the SEN Code of Practice. This should provide the framework for early education settings in supporting early identification, assessment and intervention programmes. Area SENCOs may wish to extend on the detail contained in the Code and put this into context for settings. This can be achieved by training or through direct support aimed at demonstrating the principles of the Code through collaborative action.
28. To support settings or newly identified setting SENCOs with limited knowledge of SEN, Area SENCOs may direct them to other documentation such as the Parents Guide to the SEN Code or develop their own summary documentation setting out core details to help ensure that practitioners have important baseline knowledge. For such settings accessible advice and support will be key to providing effective Early Years Action and understanding the protocols for Early Years Action Plus – see *Working with settings*.

29. Settings may also generally need support in drawing up and reviewing individual education plans until they have acquired the skills and confidence they need to write, implement and review IEPs.

## Setting SENCOs and the SEN policy

30. All early education settings should have an identified SENCO. The SENCO in the setting has responsibility for drawing up and implementing the setting's SEN Policy covering issues of inclusion and admissions. The manager of the setting has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the SEN policy is put into effect. All staff in the setting should support the SENCO in their role and contribute to the SEN policy. Area SENCOs should help ensure that training provided to the setting SENCO is disseminated to all staff in the setting, wherever possible, in order to create a common understanding of SEN and Disability.
31. The full details on the responsibilities of the SENCO are set out in Chapter 4:15 in the SEN Code of Practice but all staff may be encouraged to share these responsibilities as appropriate. A framework for the SEN policy is attached at Annex B.
32. The Area SENCO in supporting settings in relation to the SEN Code will inevitably be supporting them in relation to some of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. DfES has developed a DDA early years leaflet to support settings, and this should be available from January 2003.

## Working with the Settings - 3

33. Effective work with settings will be essential to the success of the Area SENCO programme. To succeed in providing effective support there needs to be a solid relationship based on trust and respect between the Area SENCO and the settings. From the outset it should be explained to settings that the Area SENCOs are not intended to diminish their role. They seek to enhance the positive impact of the setting for the benefit of the children in their care. These important messages should form the basis of any introduction sessions. Settings need to have confidence in the Area SENCO if they are to act on the advice and strategies suggested and modelled by them.

### How to identify the setting's needs

34. All settings will have different support needs and the Area SENCOs will need to respond and work in a flexible way in order to meet those needs. The amount of support each setting receives should be based on their individual need. It is possible to carry out an initial assessment to identify the level of Area SENCO support needed. An early indication might be based on the content of the SEN Policy and the setting's general awareness of the content detail.
35. As part of an initial visit to a setting, the Area SENCO should meet both the manager and the setting SENCO to discuss practice, policy, knowledge and their experience of supporting SEN. This will help provide the Area SENCO with an overview of each setting covering the layout, whether it has strong Foundation Stage approach to early learning and indications of whether the needs of the children are all being met.
36. As part of a fuller assessment the Area SENCO should note:
- What level of experience the setting has had in meeting the needs of children with SEN;
  - How staff interact with children;
  - How children interact with their peers;
  - How staff interact with one another;
  - How the setting works in partnership with parents;
  - How the setting is promoting inclusion;
  - How the setting makes information accessible;
  - How children access equipment and the curriculum;
  - How children with SEN are generally supported in the setting;
  - How behaviour management strategies are used;
  - How staff talk with and support children; and
  - How the activities are planned and organised.

37. These observations, coupled with information from meetings with staff will help the Area SENCOs to identify the amount of support the setting will require. As workloads increase it is reasonable for the Area SENCO to prioritise, responding to settings that need support in setting up interim intervention plans for children with identified SEN. The Area SENCO team focus should be on helping and developing the setting's confidence to find their own solutions, wherever possible. It is important to strike a balance between support from the Area SENCO and enhancing the setting's independence to handle and respond to challenges themselves.
38. It may be appropriate for some settings to receive increased input to help them cope with specific areas of need or implement strategies for a particular child. This intervention may require frequent visits to the setting over a short space of time to support the setting; work with an individual child; identify the relevant service to request additional resources/support; and enable them to effectively monitor the success of the intervention.

### Settings with a high staff turnover

39. Area SENCOs will be particularly important in supporting settings with a high staff turnover and will be key to providing consistent intervention for a child with identified SEN in such a setting. Development of strategies within the setting will also need to be put in place to reduce the impact of staff moving from a setting. This may include careful record keeping, regular updating of the SEN policy and effective sharing of communication within the settings. It may be preferable that the SENCO is from the management team and the Area SENCO may need to agree that other staff in addition to the SENCO takes up specific SENCO training.

### What support should be provided?

40. In addition to the support issues detailed elsewhere in the guidance the Area SENCOs can support settings in the following areas.
- The careful observation of children to assess needs;
  - The adaptation of learning activities to make them more inclusive;
  - Providing information on the protocols for accessing resources to support children at Early Years Action Plus;
  - Improving liaison with parents;
  - Modelling of small group sessions;
  - Regular clear communication;
  - Notification to all parents on the work with their child's setting;
  - Attendance at setting meetings to help resolve particular issues;
  - Setting goals for staff to develop practice;
  - When appropriate - working one to one with a child; and
  - Supporting the setting in setting up systems to release the SENCO or a colleague for training and other key events.



## How should Area SENCOs approach settings to provide support?

41. In approaching settings Area SENCOs should be sensitive to the nature of the setting and care taken to fit into the setting's routine. It is a good idea to take time to find out what strategies the setting has tried and how successful they were. Setting staff will need to feel that their concerns are valid and early discussions should aim to give them confidence in their own intuitive knowledge of children, activities and strategies.
42. Area SENCOs will need to tailor support in light of the individual setting needs and respond to their concerns. For example, many settings may find meal times very stressful, particularly if there are children with challenging behaviour and the setting may welcome support and advice in handling this time more effectively. A visit at this time would also provide the Area SENCO with an excellent opportunity to observe the children during mealtime. Area SENCOs should keep a note of important fundamental visits detailing who they spoke to, the strategies agreed and any follow-up action required.
43. Below are some examples of the comments provided by settings in response to Area SENCO input.

*Without your input I would not have had the courage to contact the likes of educational psychologists or write reports about children in my setting.*

*After discussions about the different ways to approach parents, I have gained confidence to talk to parents about any concerns.*

*Where necessary I feel able to give information on the processes that we follow under the Code of Practice before the statementing procedures can be undertaken, knowing you are always available to answer any of my queries.*

*As a pre-school leader without any 'hands on' experience of a child with SEN, I have had to rely on books and college training. Now we are lucky enough to have a specialised team, who are there when we need them.*

*We have been waiting for this support for a long, long time.*

## Case Study from a pilot

*Richard is attending full day care in a non-maintained nursery setting attached to a maintained school. He has two siblings and all three are in full-time foster care. Concerns were raised in the setting regarding Richard's behaviour, speech and language development, social skills and inappropriate play. The setting leader and support worker were encouraged by the Area SENCO to access training offered by the EYDCP on behaviour management, which they did. Referral was made to the Speech and Language Therapy service, which now visits the setting on a regular basis. The setting leader had a very good professional relationship with the foster carer and was invited to attend case conferences. Social Services had wanted to initiate play therapy but were unable to do so because of Richard's communication difficulties and his age related development. However, since the involvement of the area SENCO, progress has been made to such an extent that this therapy can now be put in place earlier than expected. Social Services also requested that support be increased to three sessions during the summer term to continue this progress and aid transition into the maintained sector, which will take place in September.*

## Working with parents - 4

44. It is fundamental to supporting early identification, assessment and intervention of SEN to ensure there is effective communication with parents, a shared dialogue in all matters impacting on their child and to involve them generally in their child's holistic development. The suggested approaches in this guidance should be carried out in consultation with parents.
45. A primary focus for the Area SENCO team should be to help settings work in partnership with parents and carers. These relationships are important to help meet the needs of the child, to ensure that parents feel comfortable discussing any concerns they may have, and to make parents aware of the SEN procedures stipulated in the revised Code of Practice. The better the setting's general relationship is with parents the better chance of early identification and the more effective intervention programmes will be.

### The setting and parents

46. The Area SENCOs should emphasise that the process of early identification of SEN should start before the child joins the setting, with practitioners listening and respecting parent's accounts and views of their child's development. Area SENCOs and settings should involve **all** parents from the outset in any SEN briefing sessions to help reduce the risk of future misconceptions/ misunderstandings.
47. Parents should be informed about the role of the Area SENCO and the possible general support work with their children in the setting. The positive benefits of identifying children's needs early and providing intervention programmes to help all children reach their full potential should be explained. Further information provided to parents might include the importance of monitoring/transferring records.
48. Parents will also need to know that confidentiality between parents, the setting and the relevant agencies can be respected as this may help reduce anxieties for parents if the setting needs to share concerns with them about their child's development at a later stage.

## Approaching parents

49. All settings should be encouraged to appropriately approach parents as soon as possible if they have concerns about their child's development but they should not share any assumptions on the underlying condition or disability unless confirmed, with the parent's knowledge, by the relevant professional. Every effort should be made not to unnecessarily increase the stress and anxieties that some parents may already be dealing with if their child is in the process of being diagnosed or has recently been diagnosed with a disability. Settings should explain to the parent their concerns, consult them on seeking further advice and outline the interim plan to respond to the individual needs of the child based on their early assessment. Settings should be encouraged to inform parents of concerns in a sensitive and understanding way, avoiding the use of jargon.

## Support for parents

50. The Area SENCO should work closely with the local Parent Partnership Service to help the settings provide clear links for parents to this service and to other support services as appropriate. This is particularly important if parents have English as an additional language, a disability, or communication difficulties. This should also help ensure that a parent's early concerns about their child's development are appropriately shared with the setting and other key services.
51. The setting will be in a better position to advise and help parents if they have a positive relationship from the outset. The Area SENCO can support the setting in achieving this and enable them to acquire a deeper understanding of the value and role parents play in the education of their children.

## Parent Workshops

52. It may be possible to support settings in developing 'parent workshops' which can both enable parents to share experiences and ideas, and also help inform the setting's plans. All parents may wish to be invited to give them the opportunity to be involved. This can support parents and help ensure settings have a better understanding of SEN and disabilities, the processes and support provided, how the setting supports inclusion - for example how the outdoor area has been organised, the assessment process, language and communication activities, behaviour management techniques and details on support resources such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems. This will provide the setting with the opportunity to use the experience and knowledge of parents to support planning.

# Training and Development - 5

## SEN training

53. LEAs/EYDCPs have a target to help ensure that setting based SENCOs have undertaken at least 3 days specific SEN training by 2004. **Area SENCOs should encourage SENCOs in disseminating the information from this training to all staff in the setting.** The focus of initial training should be on encouraging a wide and deep understanding of the SEN Code of Practice (2001) and Area SENCOs should link up with wider LEA SEN training to ensure this is offered to all early years SENCOs. Area SENCOs may wish to help ensure that any locally offered training is tailored to support identified needs. They can also enable setting staff to access other appropriate local training.
54. Area SENCOs should help settings to access accredited SEN training that contributes to national qualifications where possible. Setting staff should also be encouraged and supported in carrying out a self assessment of their own training needs. Area SENCOs can then help setting staff identify courses that might be appropriate to respond to individual needs. For settings that are new to SEN issues, a good starting point might be to evaluate attitudes, values and feelings about equality issues.

## Removing barriers to training

55. It may cause some settings difficulty in releasing staff to attend training sessions and Area SENCOs should help with this by bringing training and development to the setting. They may also help the setting develop systems to enable the release of staff that are identified as a priority to attend specific training. Area SENCOs may wish to develop innovative training and development programmes such as SENCO exchange schemes, work shadowing, visiting specialist early years centres and speech and language therapy groups, and joint training with health professionals.
56. These experiences would be valuable to all practitioners but priority may need to be given to setting SENCOs and key workers supporting children with SEN and disabilities in the setting. Development of SENCO networks can support joint working between primary school SENCOs and private, voluntary and independent setting based SENCOs.
57. As part of developing training programmes, links should be developed with colleges and universities who may be in a position to support the development of courses that may not normally be available locally. Local voluntary and charitable agencies may also be able to provide or advise on training to support specific needs or disabilities.

58. The Area SENCOs can help reduce the problems of delivering training and development in rural areas and meet these needs through visiting the setting. Area SENCOs will become familiar with a particular region and will be in a better position to carefully choose the location of training venues taking into consideration the number of settings, travelling distance and supply cover arrangements.
59. There are different approaches to training and development and the following example provides just one way to approach this:

We invited SENCOs and other nursery staff to attend a meeting. We gave an overview of the Code of Practice's new guidelines on working in partnership with parents and highlighted the barriers that prevent parents from taking an active role in their child's education. The audience participated in a role-play of a child's review – each taking on a different role (e.g. parent, SENCO, manager, keyworker, and Health Visitor) with one person observing and providing feedback. This exercise highlighted the importance of demonstrating sensitivity to the parents, choosing one's words carefully, and being aware of how many people attend the review (and if their presence is really necessary). We invited 2 parents of children with SEN to give a talk in the final hour. The audience was moved by the talk from both parents as it gave them a real life experience of a parent's perspective of trying to help their child with SEN. Their presentations made it very clear that relationships with staff are essential, the overuse of jargon and the barriers that are presented make it very difficult for parents to feel confident within an early years framework in addition to accessing SEN information.

## Other core training and development

60. In supporting early identification it is important that all staff have an understanding of early childhood development. Without understanding child development staff will not be able to identify children with additional needs and subsequently provide appropriate support for those needs. It is therefore important that Area SENCOs encourage all staff to take-up Foundation Stage training and development. The Area SENCO will also need to feed this important element into other relevant SEN training programmes.
61. The DfES is developing Early Years/SEN training materials with a focus on early identification and intervention of SEN and disabilities – The materials are expected to be made available in February 2003.



## Links between the settings and LEA, Social and Health Services and others – 6

62. Area SENCOs will inevitably support links to these services as part of their day to day contact with services and settings. They can help to ensure that child referral details provided by early years settings are well organised and follow a consistent approach. The Area SENCO should provide details to settings on the protocols to access local resources. Resources may include support from a professional or details on how parents and settings can utilise a local special needs centre for a child. As part of this work the Area SENCO can also support/inform the LEA/EYDCP to improve/develop the overall local resource strategy policy.

### Developing strong links with settings

63. As part of settings developing a better understanding of local services it may be possible to involve specific services in training such as speech and language therapists who can provide helpful information on their service and give setting staff ideas on how to run language groups and other activities. They may be in a position to deliver specific training in light of the settings needs on augmentative and alternative communication. It may also be appropriate to give settings the opportunity to train alongside other professionals where this is possible – see chapter 5 *‘Training and Development’*.

### Supporting a multi agency approach

64. The most effective interventions are those that have a seamless approach to multi agency working. The extent to which Area SENCOs can support the development of strategic relationships between agencies will depend on how agencies currently collaborate and the level of other more immediate demands on the SENCO. To support Area SENCOs in this area LEAs/EYDCPs should take steps to facilitate multi agency approaches. There is no prescribed way in which this can be achieved and LEAs will be at various stages of development in this area but a starting point might be to meet and continue to liaise with all the lead personnel within the statutory agencies in LEA/EYDCP, Social and Health services to develop a joint working intervention strategy.
65. This working will be crucial to the effectiveness of Area SENCOs and, if appropriate, an identified Area SENCO may support this directly on behalf of the LEA in order to support the overall intervention programme.

### Case study –

It has been the key role of the Area SENCO Team Leader to identify and meet with key personnel in LEA, Social and Health Services. This has been difficult to arrange. However, the team leader was committed to achieving the objectives on this aspect of the pilot and health visitors, community nurses, speech and language therapists, social services management team, portage team and LEA Education Officers have now attended meetings. Meetings have been mutually beneficial and closer working relationships are definitely developing. More regular meetings with further identified key partners are planned.

### Commitment from other services

66. LEAs/EYDCPs should liaise with all relevant services who should be encouraged to set out how they will work with Area SENCOs and develop opportunities to work collaboratively with others on training sessions and initiatives within early years settings. Area SENCOs will need advice and support from all local services to enable them to support settings effectively.
67. Area SENCOs should build on work with the statutory services and other local private, voluntary and independent sector bodies who can contribute effectively to local identification and intervention programmes. It is also important to work closely with lead officers of local schemes such as Sure Start and Neighbourhood Nurseries to help ensure that good practice and advice can be shared – see *Disseminating good practice*.
68. Evidence shows that regular contact between Area SENCO teams and other services will strengthen links.

### Case study –

The local education department and the social services input funding into a pooled budget to provide one to one support for children with special needs and disabilities as appropriate. The Area SENCOs agree a set of protocols for accessing the resource and the duration that the support will be provided based on the individual needs of the child.

## Services reaching children early

69. It is essential to have close links with services that reach children at an early stage such as Portage Schemes and this can support transitions to early education settings. For the same reasons close working relationships with health visitors should be achieved. Links should also be made with the key workers and practice outlined in the DfES consultation on draft guidance - Together from the start – sees Annex C.

### A quote from a senior Portage worker:

*The planned meetings between the Area SENCOS and the Portage Teams will provide a positive step forward towards improving early education for our children and creating a seamless approach to meeting their developments needs.*

## Effective communication

70. Area SENCOs using a multi-agency approach will be in a better position to build on their existing knowledge of the children in their settings by liaising regularly with local services. This information can then be provided to the key worker in the setting. It is paramount that the Area SENCO supports the setting in seeking advice quickly as in some cases professionals from Health/Social Services may already be involved with the child and this will help avoid duplication of work.
71. Strong links with health services are key and links with Social Services are important in ensuring that when concerns relate to a child with SEN the Area SENCOs can notify the LEA. The Area SENCOs will inevitably need to make contact with specific professionals to support settings in meeting the needs of individual children in their care. The development of better links and joint strategies can only improve how this works.

## Links with schools to assist transition – 7

72. Area SENCOs should promote links with private, voluntary and independent settings and LEA maintained primary schools. They are also in a position to help settings stress the importance to parents of transferring records for all children making moves between early education settings including transitions to school. Schools should also value the contribution that early education settings have made in supporting a child's needs and the observations that have been recorded. In supporting early identification of SEN the importance of looking through reports should be stressed to schools.

### Transferring records/reports

73. Area SENCOs may in some cases need to break down barriers on schools perceptions of non-maintained settings in order that valuable information is not lost. The report format should be such that early years settings are confident in completing it and the receiving school finds it useful. Settings should include a contact phone number in the report so that schools can clarify information provided by the setting.
74. In order that records are of good quality and helpful to schools we recommend that:
- Parents are consulted within settings to enable them to fully support and agree that records should be passed to schools.
  - Records enable parents to make their own observations.
  - Schools are consulted on the format and information needed to support consistent information.
  - Schools are encouraged to set up procedures to help ensure that reports are passed to the receiving teacher and that they have been read.
  - A workable model of transition between all settings is developed.

### Introductory visits

75. Many schools already have good systems for introducing parents and children to their school. Area SENCOs will need to consider on a case by case basis whether they need to support the process. If Area SENCOs have established good links with schools they may encourage receiving teachers or support workers to visit the child in their familiar educational environment to meet the child, parents and setting staff prior to the transition to school. As part of the local introduction of Area SENCOs the support role of an Area SENCO in supporting transitions should be explained to schools.
76. The Area SENCOs should help the setting support the parents of a child with SEN who request support in visiting the receiving school. This may come from the Parent Partnership or the setting may wish to accompany the parent to the school to pass on the setting's records for the child and meet with staff in the receiving school.

## Supporting transitions for children with SEN at Early Years Action Plus

77. For children with identified SEN at Early Years Action Plus the Area SENCO should support the setting in providing any additional details for the receiving teacher outlining:
- The identified SEN;
  - The previous involvement of the Area SENCO;
  - The intervention programme provided in the early years setting;
  - Recommendation on the strategies that would support a successful transition; and
  - The contact details on any services supporting the child or who have been contacted.

## Developing and disseminating good practice - 8

78. The Area SENCOs will generally disseminate good practice on their day to day contact with early education settings. In doing this Area SENCOs will need to build in the sensitivities surrounding the settings perception of this input and should focus primarily on giving staff the opportunity to make the changes themselves.
79. Area SENCOs should encourage and provide opportunities for practitioners to share information between settings. This can be carried out in training or alternative ways such as staff exchange schemes or visits to other pre-schools – further suggestions are detailed in *Training and development* - 5. Area SENCOs may wish to draw up good practice guidance based on particular areas such as behaviour management. As relationships with Area SENCOs and settings develop it should become easier to share good practice examples and settings will become more receptive to good practice.
80. The Area SENCO can also lead by example and interact with a child or group of children during an activity, encouraging the children to communicate by asking relevant, open-ended questions, where appropriate. In visiting settings and delivering training the Area SENCOs should aim to improve the observation skills, record keeping, and good practice.

## Evaluation - 9

81. It is commonly acknowledged that early preventative support can have a measurable effect on reducing the need for statutory services in a child's school life.
82. To support the Area SENCO programme an ongoing evaluation should be arranged to demonstrate the measurable impact of the service, in terms of specific outcomes and measures. To inform local policy development it will be necessary to identify and monitor some specific measures e.g. increase in the number of children identified with SEN in the early years; a reduction in the number of children in reception being referred for speech and language therapy services; a reduction in the number of children on entry to Year 1 being temporarily excluded due to challenging behaviour; and an increase in children with complex disabilities being supported in mainstream early education settings.
83. Area SENCOs can support settings in their individual evaluations that could include responses from both parents and children. This could feed into a wider LEA/EYDCP evaluation covering face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, focus group interview, observation and documentary analyses.



## ANNEX A - Background

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) are responsible locally for ensuring all children, including those with special needs, have access to early education, and to high quality, affordable childcare. LEAs should work with EYDCPs to endeavour to adopt a transparent and coherent SEN resource strategy, which describes, as far as possible, the resources available for childcare and early years education and how and when they should be accessed.

LEAs have the power and additional resources (via their SSA allocations) to supply goods and services to early years settings outside the maintained school sector where a child eligible for free early years education has special educational needs but does not have a statement of these. Social Services Departments also have extensive responsibilities for care and support of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Chapter 4 in the SEN Code of Practice (2001) entitled "Identification, Assessment and Provision in Early Education Settings" expands significantly on the material on under-fives published in 1994. Every early years setting will need to have regard to the SEN Code of Practice and must have an SEN policy and a SENCO. This is also a condition of the *Requirements of Nursery Education Grant*. In addition, the SEN and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) will enable private, voluntary and independent sector settings to request statutory assessments for the 4 year olds in their care and for 3 year olds by 2004 (when we expect universal provision for this age group). SENDA also brought in changes to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and the DfES has developed a guidance leaflet to support settings with their duties - this will be available from January 2003.

The core reference document for early learning - *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* - was published in May 2000 and stresses the importance of early intervention and the key role practitioners play in identifying learning needs, and the planning required to support those needs. The guidance states that an awareness and understanding of the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice and the monitoring of each child's progress throughout the Foundation Stage is **essential**.

## Annex B – Framework for a SEN policy

The SEN Policy should be seen in the context of equal opportunities and should be designed to promote inclusion.

The following information should be included:

- A clear statement as to what the policy is seeking to achieve and how it relates to the SEN Code of Practice.
- The name of the person responsible within the setting for co-ordinating day-to-day provision of education for pupils with SEN.
- Support available within the setting for children with SEN, including facilities for increasing access for pupils who are disabled.
- Arrangements for reviewing, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of SEN provision, both in relation to individual across pupils and all pupils the setting.
- Arrangements for partnership working with parents/carers and for taking into account the ascertainable wishes of the child.
- Procedures for resolving complaints about SEN provision.

A brief description of the arrangements in place to link effectively with others on SEN issues and exchange information as necessary: eg local SEN support services, child health services, social services, organisations in the voluntary sector, plus links and information transfer arrangements with other early education settings in the area, mainstream primary schools and special schools.

## Annex C

### – Useful Publications

#### **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and SEN Toolkit**

*– Available from DfES Publications.*

#### **Parents Guide to the SEN Code of Practice**

*– Available from DfES Publications.*

#### **Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs – A good practice guide.**

*This publication is aimed at schools but the principles and practice set out in this guidance could apply to early education settings.*

*Available from DfES Publications.*

**Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage** – *The core reference document for early education. Available from DfES Publications.*

**Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings** – *Available from DfES Publications.*

**Together from the start** – *Consultation on practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to 2) and their families. Available from DfES Publications.*

#### **Autistic Spectrum Disorders Good Practice Guide**

*– Available from DfES Publications.*

**Intervening Early** – *This publication is aimed at primary schools. Available from DfES Publications.*

**Sure Start: working with families who have children with special needs and disabilities** – *A guide for programme managers, staff and volunteers who work within Sure Start programmes, to help them support families who have children with special needs and disabilities. Available from DfES Publications.*

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